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ABSTRACT

Perhaps the most controversial and provocative issue in the discussion of reading failure in inner-city schools has been the relationship between Black English Vernacular (BEV), reading failure, and reading instruction. The debate has focused on the degree to which BEV does or does not interfere with the acquisition of reading/language arts skills. Despite the insistence by some researchers that dialect interference plays a major role in black children's reading failure, it can also be argued that the ways teachers communicate in the classroom may well be a more critical factor in black children's success in learning to read than the preoccupation with the relationship between dialect differences and reading failure. The ethnographic description of the communicative pattern of the inner-city classroom is a new and relatively uncharted area of inquiry. The results of this inquiry can help to provide knowledge necessary to achieve the goal of literacy among inner-city children. (Author)

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Beyond Black English: Toward An Ethnography Of Communication in the Inner-City Classroom*

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Abstract

Perhaps the most controversial and provocative issue in the discussion of reading failure in inner-city schools has been the relationship between Black English Vernacular (BEV), reading failure, and reading instruction. The debate has focused on the degree to which BEV does or does not interfere with the acquisition of reading/language arts skills. Despite insistence by some researchers that dialect interference plays a major role in Black children's reading failure, this paper argues that the ways teachers communicate in the classroom may well be a more critical factor in Black children's success in learning to read than the preoccupation with the relationship between dialect differences and reading failure. The ethnographic description of the communicative pattern of the inner-city classroom is a new and relatively unchartered area of inquiry. The results of this inquiry can help to provide knowledge necessary to achieve the goal of literacy among inner-city children.

Reading Failure and Dialect: Their Relation to Instruction

A particularly provocative consequence of the emerging sociolinguistic perspective in education has been the issue of nonstandard English dialects. At the forefront of linguistic research on dialectology is the language of the Black community, the Black English Vernacular (BEV). Linguists have argued that given the evidence that many inner-city children use consistent forms of nonstandard English, focusing on language differences as one source of poor performance will help to clarify some steps in improving the education of Black children. "While there is considerable evidence that both reading failure and dialect differences occur in urban, inner-city schools, there is little more than speculation about whether dialect differences make learning to read more difficult for Black children and about how teachers could ease possible difficulties" (Piestrup, 1973, p. 1.).

The Structure of Black English Vernacular

William Labov is credited with establishing the field of sociolinguistic investigation of BEV in America.

Labov (1965) identified the socially significant variables which differentiate Black speakers from the rest of the New York City speech community and defined those structural and functional conflicts of BEV with standard English (SE)

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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which may cause difficulties in the acquisition of reading skills. Labov concluded that lower-class Black children speak a well-ordered, highly structured, but different, dialect from that of SE.

Structural Conflict

Goodman (1965) observed that "the more divergence there is between the dialect of the learner and the dialect of learning, the more difficult will be the task of learning to read" (p. 853). He suggested that sound divergence (intonation and phonemes) and grammar divergence (suffixes and lexicon) may provide for interference in reading. The divergence may also result in problems concerning the content of instruction as well as the attitudes and feelings of teachers and children. Labov (1972a) defines structural conflict as "interference with learning ability stemming from a mismatch of linguistic structures" (p. 6). Table 3 presents an example of structural conflict recorded by investigators in an inner-city classroom situation. The teacher's handling of this situation is extremely important. Table 4 presents a continuation of this episode.

Insert Tables 3 and 4
about here

The child interpreted the word "colt" as "somethin' you wear," or "coat." There is a linguistic mismatch (L-lessness variable) or interference between the child's system and that of the school.

Functional Conflict

Labov (1972a) defines functional conflict of SE and BEV as "interference with the desire to learn standard English stemming from a mismatch in the functions which standard and nonstandard English perform in a given culture" (p. 6). The following excerpt from an oral reading lesson is an example of functional conflict in which involvement in learning to read is lacking:

Insert Table 5 about here

Piestrup (1973) observes the following:

The children are not involved in the lesson. The content is remote and the teacher is not communicating well with the children. She ignores most of what they say and continues as if the children were focused on the lesson. Besides a usual sort of resistance, "Daren 'sposed to be first." the children start a special form, verbal play, as in

"He crack his knucles
 In the buckles"

and

"I got me a tow truck
 My mama bought me one
 An' I got me a car to hook it on
 It got a hook..."

This is not just said; it is almost sung, with lilting intonation; the lesson is ignored. Later the teacher is excluded explicitly as the children define group membership in their verbal play. (p. 7)

The Poverty Cycle and Language Theory

Black children's language has attracted attention for reasons other than those specifically related to reading proficiency. Williams (1970) relates the efforts of cognitive deficit and linguistic difference theorists to the War on Poverty of the 1960's. Educational interventions were considered an important means of breaking the poverty cycle.

Deficit Position

Advocates of the deficit position have asserted that lower-class Black children have no language at all. Instead of objectively criticizing the school, these theorists contend that problems intrinsic to the student and to his culture prevent the schools from educating them. This frame of reference, which attributes dysfunction to the individual or to his SES or race and not to the school system, is a clear case of institutionalized racism.

Bernstein (1962, 1971) proposed a distinction between two forms of language: the Restricted Code and the Elaborated Code. The Restricted Code is said to arise among the lower working-class social strata, and the net effect of the constraint imposed on children from these respective social strata by the Restricted Code will be to depress potential linguistic ability, raise the relevance of the concrete and descriptive level of response and inhibit generalizing ability at the higher ranges. The Elaborated Code allows the speaker

to select from among syntactic alternatives, encourages differentiation of vocabulary and implies the ability to deal with complex, conceptual ideas. Bernstein argues that the value system of the middle class permeates the fiber of the learning context itself in the Elaborated Code.

Whiteman and Deutsch (1968) and Hunt (1968) have pointed to environmental factors such as relatively limited conversation at dinner, limited cultural activities, living under crowded conditions and the lack of verbal stimulation by adult speech models as indicative of cognitive and intellective impairment.

Jensen (1969) argues that although extreme environmental deprivation can keep the lower class Black child from performing up to his genetic potential, it is the genetic inferiority of the Black populace that emerges as the most consistent hypothesis. He further argues that the white middle-class can be distinguished from the white and Black lower-class in terms of the ability for "cognitive or conceptual learning" or Level II intelligence.

Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) have interpreted Bernstein's theories to mean "that the speech of lower class people follows a linguistic code . . . that is inadequate for expressing personal or original opinions, for analysis and careful reasoning, for dealing with anything hypothetical or beyond the present, and for explaining anything very complex" (p. 32). In support of the notion that Black children have no language,

they make the following points:

1. The speech of the severely deprived children seems to consist not of distinct words, but rather of whole phrases or sentences that function like giant words...
2. . . . the child's faulty pronunciation arises from his inability to deal with sentences as sequences of meaningful parts.
3. Many disadvantaged children of preschool age come very close to the total lack of ability to use language as a device for acquiring and processing information. (p. 34-35, 39)

Difference Position

Malcolm Coulthard (1969) has outlined a number of inconsistencies in the data which Bernstein uses to support his theory. Moreover, current linguistic data cannot support one of the classic arguments for language intervention programs: linguistic and cognitive deficits which must be remedied if the Black child is to succeed in school.

The supporting data used to justify the social pathology model consists largely of: (1) responses to sociological, survey-type questionnaires or (2) interaction situations contrived in educational laboratories. No evidence derived from anthropologically-oriented field work in the Black home is offered in support of these absurd speculations on the linguistic competence of the Black child.

Labov (1972b) observes that interviews taken in contrived settings by adults are invalid because they simply measure the child's ability to cope with a threatening situation. The social context is the most significant variable in determining language behavior for speakers of BEV; an adult must enter into the proper social relation with a child in order to accurately assess his capacity for verbal functioning or his responses to researcher's questions.

Cazden (1970) has rejected both the language difference and language deficit views of child language as applied to lower-class Black children on two grounds: (1) they ignore patterns of use in actual speech events and (2) they ignore the child's communicative competence. "At any one moment, a child decides to speak or to be silent, to adopt communicative intent A or communicative intent B, to express idea X or idea Y, in form 1 or 2" (p. 84). The options that the child selects will be a function of the characteristics of the speech situation as he perceives it on the basis of his past experience.

Erickson (1969) found that both groups of inner-city young people and suburban young people shifted back and forth between relatively restricted and relatively elaborated codes, depending on context, in discussing the significance of popular song lyrics.

Linguists and educators, having considered the totality of sociolinguistic data available to describe the language structure and behavior of BEV speakers, have made a great many recommenda-

tions about how teachers should modify instruction to deal with dialect interference. Some of the recommendations are founded more on assumptions about the social consequences of dialect use than on evidence on ways to improve reading.

Dialect Readers. Joan Baratz (1970) and William Stewart (1970) have been advocates of the use of dialect readers in beginning reading instruction. They have argued that because of differences between the Black child's linguistic system and that of printed materials, beginning reading materials must be presented in the child's system.

Roger Shuy (1969) has suggested that dialect readers conform to three general principles: (1) grammatical choices should not provide extraneous data; (2) grammatical choices should provide adequate data; and (3) grammatical choices should provide sequentially relevant data. First the child must be taught to read and then he can be taught to read SE. Baratz suggests that "transition texts" be provided to move the child from BEV to SE. However, empirical tests of dialect texts have shown, rather conclusively, that they are both impractical and politically explosive.

Nolen (1972) and Johnson and Simons (1973) have demonstrated that the dialect text leads to reduced comprehension, less effective use of contextual and graphophonic information and greater dialect--related miscues than the SE text. These findings appear to support Conrad (1972) who observes that the fact that for perhaps two years or so a child may have been

quite fluent in using and comprehending spoken language is possibly irrelevant when it comes to language visually perceived. The importance of phonological coding in reading leads one to question the introduction of written patterns which will not remain constant.

Wiggins (1971) and Mathewson (1973) have concluded that Black children are significantly more interested in SE reading materials than in those written in BEV.

De Stafeno (1971) investigated the views of Black adults toward BEV. All subjects expressed total opposition to the use of BEV in beginning reading texts. However, Hoover (1978) has determined that the Black community does not reject the use of BEV in any form; instead, the Black community has its own sociolinguistic rules on the appropriate context for each form of BEV. Through the use of a questionnaire distributed to Black parents in the Bay Area of California, Hoover found that parents preferred that BEV be used only in certain contexts, including home, church, etc. For other contexts, particularly work and school, parents preferred the use of standard Black English (SBE)* over SE.

Teach SE before the Teaching of Reading. Richard Rystrom (1968, 1970) has twice concluded that mastery of SE is not a necessary prerequisite to learning to read. In each

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* SBE is that form of speech having the same syntax as SE but using varying degrees of Black phonology and Black intonation.

case, a Grammatical Training Program was not effective in improving the scores on word reading tests in which the relationship between letters and sounds was controlled. Subjects in both studies were Black first graders.

Goodman (1970) has questioned the assumptions and not the results of Rystrom's research. If materials are meaningful and relevant, and if pupils are encouraged to constantly seek for meaning as they read, problems of grammar will diminish in importance. Children will tend to equate grammatical structures from their own dialect with those in the reading materials and assign a deep structure that they can decode. Goodman observes that to equate "White" in language with standard and "Black" with nonstandard confuses the linguistic utility of different dialects with the social values placed on them.

Dialectally Appropriate Reading of Extant Materials. Both Goodman (1965) and Wolfram (1970) have endorsed the alternative of allowing speakers of BEV to render a dialectally appropriate reading of extant materials. Psycholinguistic research has indicated that Black children have a receptive competence in SE (research by Hall & Freedle, 1973, indicate a productive competence as well); however, this does not preclude the possibility that some information loss may occur because of dialect differences. What to do about features unfamiliar to the Black child poses an empirical question which must be faced directly if no change in traditional reading materials

is advocated. Acceptance of this alternative will require a knowledge on the part of teachers of the structural patterns of BEV and the legitimacy of Black language patterns.

Language Experience Approach. Cramer (1971) argues that to "whatever degree reading achievement appears to be negatively influenced by dialect differences, to that same degree these negative influences could be ameliorated or eliminated by providing a closer match between the language of initial reading materials and the language of the child" (p. 34). The best way to insure that beginning reading materials reflect this linguistic ideal is to provide the child with an opportunity to dictate his own beginning reading material. The Language Experience Approach (LEA) rests on the assumption that reading can be most meaningfully taught when the reading materials accurately reflect the child's own experience as described by his language.

Teaching methodology appropriate to LEA is extensively described in Ashton-Warner (1963); Hall (1970); Lee and Allen (1963); and Stauffer (1970). The reader is referred to these references for further information.

Hall (1972a) outlines the linguistic rationale for LEA. Beginning readers are taught to view reading as a communication process and as a process of consciously relating print to oral language. The learning of writing is incorporated with the learning of reading so that processes of encoding and decoding may be mutually reinforced. Teachers record syntactic patterns of the children as spoken (see Table 2) but using standard

orthography; phonological differences (see Table 1) are not recorded, i.e., phonological differences are not represented in the orthography. Finally, the child learns to read meaningful language units read in a smooth, fluent, natural expression.

Hall (1972b) presents a comprehensive summary and synthesis of existing research literature on LEA for the culturally and linguistically different Black child. General findings on achievement reveal that the overall effectiveness of LEA is neither overwhelmingly supported nor convincingly rejected. However, the potential of LEA for speakers of BEV has not been thoroughly explored through research. Evidence suggests that inner-city Black children can be taught to read successfully when programs are appropriate to their needs. LEA can be one effective methodological approach to teaching Black children to read. A major question for future research concerns the analysis of dialect divergence in connection with LEA instruction.

It is the opinion of this writer that Black children must ultimately master SE syntax for purposes of survival in a highly competitive society whose standards for literacy are based on SE. However, the natural and legitimate language system of the Black community msut not be eradicated in favor of the more socially acceptable SE. Clearly, there must be an acceptance of the biloquialist perspective in language learning, and Black children must be prepared to "live in two worlds simultaneously." The reader is referred to Fasold

and Shuy (1970), Gladney and Leaverton (1971), and McPhail (1975) for discussions of sociolinguistic alternatives in teaching SE syntax to BEV speakers.

Sociocultural Position

The newest and most provocative direction in the research on BEV and its educational implications is the sociocultural position. This position represents the application of ethnographic methodology to the study of communication in the classroom. The coming together of linguists, ethnographers and educators should have profound effects on the methods we use to assess the development of children in our schools. As such, the ethnographic description of the communicative patterns of the inner-city classroom represents a logical move away from the preoccupation with linguistic differences and reading acquisition to a concern for the ways teachers communicate in the classroom.

An Anthropological View of Education

Heath (1977) presents a most comprehensive statement of the implications of ethnography for research in education. Education and ethnography are defined as follows:

> Education as a topic for research is not defined by the anthropologist as merely formal schooling; indeed, education refers to the process of learning which extends throughout life and is not bound to a specific institution designated "school." To distinguish between in-school and out-of-school experiences, anthro-

pologists use the terms formal schooling and enculturation. The former refers to the processes and patterns of operation within formal institutions established and managed for the purpose of "education." Such institutions are most frequently associated with complex modernized nations which include diverse societies within their populations. The latter term, enculturation, refers to the ongoing transmission of culture by and for individuals within every society. (p. 2)

Moreover, the anthropologist's emphasis on the transmission of culture across physical and temporal boundaries is supported by the central role of ethnography as both concept and method. The perspective of cultural anthropology is ethnography; the task of direct observation and participation in particular societies is ethnography. The goal of ethnographic research is a description of the ways in which societies organize their behaviors, determine their values and transmit these to future generations, and use them to maintain their social unity. An ethnographer attempts by becoming a partic pant in a social group to record and describe the overt, manifest, and explicit behaviors within the culture. By long residence and intimate study, the ethnographer learns the language structure and its functions, and attempts to recognize patterns of behavior which may be covert, ideal, and implicit

to the members of the culture. The range of techniques includes mapping, charting kinship and other patterns of interaction according to role designations, interviewing, collecting life histories, and using both oral and written documentation, collecting folk songs, tales, riddles, rhymes, and proverbs. If used at all, survey data, questionnaires, and other experimental methods not natural to the group play a much less significant role then participation-observation; if other methods are used, they are usually not initiated until thorough observation and participation are well underway. (p.3)

Ethnography in the Classroom/Ethnography of Literacy

The application of ethnographic methodology to the study of functions of language in the classroom is analyzed by Heath (1977) as follows:

Very recently, "ethnography in the classroom" has supplemented traditional approaches to the study of formal settings in education. Drawing heavily from linguistics (specifically discourse analysis), ethnomethodology, and pragmatics, this research focuses on teaching as a linguistic process in a cultural setting. The objective of observation and participation in the classroom by the ethnographer is not simply to record the linguistic utterances, but to provide data which will reveal how speakers select among verbal and nonverbal alternatives. The researcher wants to determine how teachers and students use facts

about the world to decode and interpret language, written and oral. Classroom language includes ways teachers ask questions, give commands, praise and reinforcement; strategies students use to interpret these; and ways in which written materials across subject areas structure tactics children use to decide what it is they need to comprehend in texts, respond to workbook exercises, and answer questions form the text or on tests. Research into the nature of the rules of discourse in school allows teachers to recognize how certain messages (i.e., "have you finished your work?") are interpreted by students not for their surface message but for underlying signals ("return to your seat"). (p. 8-9)

Most recently, researchers have proposed "an ethnography of literacy" which would reveal how reading and writing are defined in classrooms (what events of the day are classified by teachers and students as "reading?") and within communities. In addition, pragmatics, which attempts to identify the facts about the real world necessary to encode and interpret language, directs attention to the need for specific information on the real-world facts students bring to such school activities as reading. This information is contained not only in observations about the range of experiences students have had with specific content areas, but in a much more general

sense, the out-of-school experiences students have had to prepare them for the decontextualization of reading and writing tasks in the school. A move into literacy requires acceptance of literature sources as essentially decontextualized, as authorities of a very special type. All of these areas of research relate directly to the current merging of interest in re-examining basic skills and relating these to multi-cultural education. Moreover, in spite of current proposals for minimum competency tests as "rites of passage" for school diplomas, there are educators and anthropologists calling for research which will help predict the retention of literacy skills beyond high school.

Critical determinants of retention of skills depend on relating methods, materials and goals in the school to the community/family/culture of students. (p. 9-10)

Review of Studies in the Ethnography of Communication in the Inner-City Classroom

Perhaps the most convincing study of cultural transmission in the schools is Leacock's (1969) study of teaching and learning in four city schools. Leacock examined what was being imparted to children in ordinary, city school classrooms, and the specific differences in Black and White, lower and middle income schools. The study investigated how and what children are learning in school, in order to arrive at a fuller understanding

of what aspects of classroom life are most significant for their intellectual growth and understanding. Its purpose was to yield greater insight into the processes of teaching and learning in the context of observing ways in which children are being socialized into various roles in American society.

The second and fifth grades were studied in a low-income Black school, a low-income White school, a middle-income Black school, and a middle-income White school. Data were collected through observations of classroom proceedings and interviews with the teachers and children. All classes were observed from February through May. Two observers recorded in the classroom: one concentrated on the teacher and the children with whom she was immediately interacting, and the other focused on the children. Both observers recorded the time at the beginning and end of transitions, interruptions, disciplinary episodes, and any other slightly unusual incidents. The teacher-observer recorded as much of the teacher's verbatim evaluative, disciplinary, and motivating statements as possible, the general content and specific techniques of her teaching, and all names of the children she called on, referred to, or signaled. They also recorded the correctness or incorrectness of a child's reply to the teacher and generally noted classroom reactions to specific teacher actions that the child-observer might not catch. The child-observer tried to record as much of the quality and atmosphere of the class as possible in terms of child-child interactions degree of attentiveness, content of elaborated or initiated statements by the children, the behavior of a child after a significant interaction with the teacher was closed, and the reactions of other children.

The results showed that the school experience of the low-income Black children contrasted sharply with that of the White middle-income children. It was found, for example, that the teacher working with White middle-income fifth-grade children took the children's lack of attention as a cue to her, indicating the need for her to arouse their interest. On the other hand, the teacher of the low-income Black children attributed boredom on their part to their presumably limited attention span. In general, the expectations for the low-income Black children were low, and there was little respect shown for their ability to learn. It was found that the contributions of the low-income Black children would be cut off and underminded and that the interest shown by the children would be stifled with irrelevant personal remarks. It was also found that in the classroom there was no attempt to "impose middle-class goals" on the children, but rather a tacit assumption that those goals were not open to at least the vast majority of them. The middle-class values which were being imposed on them defined them as inadequate and their proper role as one of deference. Lowered expectations on the part of the teachers were expressed by a low emphasis on goal-setting statements altogether. In a three-hour period, clear-cut, overt goal-setting statements numbered 12 and 13 for the low-income Black school, 15 and 18 for low-income White school, and 43 and 46 for the middle-income White school.

Smith and Geoffrey (1968) utilized for the first time the science of "microethnography" as a method to observe and analyze an urban classroom. Microethnography is a descrip-

tive analysis of virtually every detail of behavior of those persons observed over a period of time. The two observers in this study were Louis Smith, a University professor of educational psychology, and William Geoffrey, the classroom teacher and a student of Smith. Smith took copious notes on his observations of a sixth-grade class in a large urban city "someplace in these United States." The period of observation was from the first day of classes in the Fall to their conclusion at the end of the semester.

Briefly, the procedure was as follows:

1. A longhand record of classroom events was obtained by the nonparticipant-observer (Dr. Smith); this consisted of direct reports of the behavior of the teacher, the children, and others who entered the classroom. Insights, inferences, and interpretive comments were bracketed so as not to interfere with objective analyses.
2. A summary of the day's observations was made each night when possible, or the first thing in the morning. Dr. Smith did not confer with any other person in writing his summaries, for he felt that research is often distorted by the chance remark of an "outsider" who brings a different thought process to an episode which is being recorded.
3. The third set of records were materials, notebooks, parents' notes and tests, which are a part of any ethnography of a classroom.

Because Smith was interested in how the microethnographic procedure would affect decision-making, he analyzed the data as follows:

1. Read through and stop at each "insightful" comment or interpretation.
2. Abstract verbatim the incident precipitating the insightful comment and the date of occurrence.
3. If possible, elaborate the significance and implications of the incident.
4. Feed the incident (No. 2) without the insight (No. 1) or the elaboration (No. 3) to Mr. Geoffrey. Ask for reasons concerning his behavior or his perception of others' behavior.
5. Later, if desirable, feed the incident plus insight and elaboration for further commentary.
6. Later, reread jointly each others' comments and talk additional interpretations into a verbatim record.
7. Include an occasional incident that seems innocuous to keep the other honest! (p. 15)

Rist's (1973) longitudinal study of a group of children from their first day of kindergarten through their second-grade Christmas party remains a landmark investigation in the ethnography of communication in the inner-city classroom.

The study took place between September 1967 and January 1970 in an all-Black school (all-Black students and teachers) in a Black community in St. Louis. Rist's concern was the means by which teachers formulate academic expectations for their students based upon their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Formal and informal observations were conducted throughout the first year by Rist. The formal observations consisted of keen observations which were chronicled in a daily log. These formal observations recounted the classroom interaction and a description of the activity which occurred. This form of observation is another example of "microethnography" (see Smith and Geoffrey, 1968). The formal observations varied in their range of time from forty-five minutes to three and one-half hours. Informal observations did not include on site note-taking, although comments were written after each class. No mechanical equipment was used. Rist was meticulous in his interviews with all those persons who affected the lives of the students--administrative staff, counselors, neighbors, siblings, parents, etc. During the first-grade year, Rist was called out of the city because of a teaching assignment in another part of the country; however, he did make four informal observations. During the second year, Rist made frequent visits to the school from September 1969 to January 1970.

Rist demonstrates how the seating assignments of the kindergarten children after the eighth day of school were determined by such social status criteria as color of skin, texture of hair and its condition, body odors, families receiving public assistance, education of parents, single parent vs. two-parent home, SE vs. BEV, and prior educational instruction in preschool programs. The teacher did not use any formal measures of academic ability or cognitive development to aid her in this decision-making.

Rist skillfully--although painfully to the sensitive reader--shows how the teachers' criteria for success became self-fulfilling in determining within the first three years of school who were the "winners" and who were the "losers"--a label that they would bear for the rest of their lives.

Two identifiable interactional processes took place within each of the classrooms during Rist's observations from September 1967 through January 1970. First, the kindergarten teacher developed expectations for different students based upon social characteristics which she perceived as essential for future academic success. Second, she reinforced through mechanisms of positive differential treatment those particular characteristics deemed important and desirable in that select group. The students, in turn, responded with behaviors which were supported and rewarded by the teacher. These children's verbalizations were encouraged, their SE responses placed them in a superior position, and their reward was their placement in advanced reading groups.

Perhaps the best application of ethnographic methodology to the study of reading acquisition in predominantly Black schools is Piestrup's (1973) study. This investigation used descriptive data and episodes from reading instruction to show the kinds of structural and functional interference which occur while dialect-speaking children are learning to read, and to describe six styles teachers use to handle dialect differences. Observations suggest that while interference in learning to read does occur for Black dialect-speaking first

graders, teachers can prevent or help to quickly resolve it. Teachers can also precipitate and intensify structural and functional conflict.

The study used quantitative data, reading and Black dialect scores, to determine which of the teaching styles identified proved more effective. Reading scores of children taught by one group, the Black Artful teachers, were significantly higher than those of children taught by other groups, the Interrupting and White Liberal teachers. The Black dialect scores of children in the Black Artful group were also significantly lower than those of children in the Interrupting or Vocabulary Emphasis group. No style was found to be more effective, specifically, for children with high dialect scores.

The results suggest that the ways teachers communicate in the classroom are crucial to children's success in learning to read. Efforts to find deficits in children or to focus on their language differences may only confound the problems of negative teacher expectations and children with different cultural backgrounds. Teachers can alienate children from learning by subtly rejecting their Black speech. They can discourage them by implying by tone, gesture and even by silence that the children lack potential. Children, in turn, can show their resilience by engaging in verbal play and ritual insult apart from the teacher, or they can withdraw into a moody silence. Neither strategy helps them to learn to read. Teachers can also involve children in learning to read in a way that capitalizes on their lively speech. They

can deal with confusion as it arises without dwelling on language differences.

Finally, McPhail (1979) investigated three sociolinguistic patterns--cross-cultural peer group interaction, language arts instruction through a rich, varied experience with language activities, social environment as a condition for learning--that are of particular relevance to researchers and classroom teachers concerned with stimulating oral communication and group process in the classroom. Four questions were investigated: (1) What is the effect of peer group interaction and one of three types of social interaction patterns (Adult-Dominated Social Situation, Peer-Dominated Social Situation, Adult-Balanced Social Situation) on the level of verbality and verbosity expressed by a multi-cultural group of 7-9 year olds engaged in language arts activities? (2) Are there any behavioral differences on the measures of verbality and verbosity across cultural groups? (3) Are there any behavioral differences in the ability to deal with abstract or complex conceptual ideas across cultural groups? and (4) How does the frequency of occurrence of grammatical constructions in BEV change over the three patterns of social interaction for speakers of the vernacular?

Observations and quantitative/qualitative analyses of transcribed data for each experimental session suggested the following: (1) Children tend to produce more complex speech when they are allowed to interact with each other free of the dominance of an adult; (2) No particular type

of linguistic structure is specially suited to any particular type of culture and no particular type of culture is better able to deal with varied language arts experiences than any other; (3) No particular type of culture has a monopoly on the ability to deal with abstract or complex conceptual ideas through language; (4) the presence of an adult in an autocratic role can influence the production of SE constructions over BEV constructions; (5) Black children appear to be comfortable with SE forms although they tend to speak BEV when interacting with White as well as Black children (see Hall & Freedle, 1973); and (6) four topics which are effective in getting children to talk involve a consideration of death, the danger of death, the threat of physical violence and moral indignation. The findings generally suggest that the universality of the reading/language arts material and its relevance to the actual experiences of the children is as important a variable in stimulating verbality and verbosity as is the provision for uninhibited peer group interaction.

Conclusions

The ethnographic description of the communicative patterns of the inner-city classroom is a new and relatively uncharted field of scientific inquiry. However, while the need for more studies in the ethnography of communication in the ~~urban~~ inner-city classroom exists, the data available suggests that the linguistic performance of children is influenced to some degree by the atmosphere of the learning environment.

The critical importance of ethnography as an educational methodology lies in its potential for providing data which will help educators remove as predictors of academic achievement such variables as language and cultural differences. Further, ethnography can provide data which will help educators to structure classroom environments so as to stimulate rich, varied oral communication and group process.

The long-range objective of developing effective oral communication is more urgent now than at any other time in history, for it seems that everywhere today there is failure in communication. The result, we know, is tragic misunderstanding among people-within families, among races, among classes and among governments.

Oral communication of any importance involves human interaction, the exchange of significant experiences. Communicative style and forms are different in different cultures. They must be understood, respected and be taken into account if communication is to go on between pupils and teacher. The challenge to make oral communication a reality in the inner-city classroom in our time is of utmost importance.

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Table 1

Phonological Differences Between SE and BEV

Variable	SE	Homonymy	BEV
R-lessness	guard		god
	nor		gnaw
	sore		saw
	Carol		Cal
	Paris		pass
	terrace		test
	par		pa
	fort		fought
	court		caught
	trial		child
	trolley		Charlie
	true		chew
L-lessness	toll		toe
	help		hep
	tool		too
	all		awe
	Saul		saw
	fault		fought
Simplication of Consonant Clusters	past		pass
	rift		riff
	meant		men
	best		Bess
	guest		guess
	asks		ask, ass
	mend		men
	wind		wine
	hold		hole
	six		sick
	box		bock
	Max		Mack
	mix		Mick

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	SE	Homonymy	BEV
Weakening of Final Consonants	boot		boo
	road		row
	feed		feet
	seat		seed, see
	poor		poke, pope
	bit		bid, big
Other Phonological Variables	pin		pen
	tin		ten
	since		cents
	find		found, fond
	time		Tom
	Ruth		roof
	death		deaf
	beer		bear
	cheer		chair
	steer		stair
	peel		pail
	boil		ball
	oil		all
	stream		scream
	strap		scrap
	poor		pour
	sure		shore
	moor		more

Source: The data in Table 1 are from Labov, 1972a, pp. 13-35.

Table 2

Syntactic Differences Between SE and BEV

Variable	SE	BEV
1. Linking verb	He is going.	He--goin.
2. Possessive marker	John's cousin.	John--cousin.
3. Plural marker	I have five cents.	I got five cent--.
4. Subject expression	John lives in New York.	John he live in New York.
5. Verb form	I drank the milk.	I drunk the milk.
6. Past marker	Yesterday he walked home	Yesterday he walk--home.
7. Verb agreement	He runs home.	He run--home.
8. Future form	I will go home.	I'ma go home.
9. "If" Construction	I asked if he did it.	I ask did he do it.
10. Negation	I don't have any.	I don't got none.
11. Indefinite article	I want an apple.	I want a apple.
12. Pronoun form	We have to do it.	Us got to do it.
13. Preposition	He is over at his friend's house.	He over to his house.
14. Be	Statement: He is here all the time.	Statement: He be here.
15. Do	Contradiction: No, he isn't.	Contradiction: No, he don't.

Source: Baratz, 1969, pp. 99-100.

Table 3

Structural Conflict

T	'. . . how would you ' rm the colt?'
C_1	Tear it.
T	Huh?
C_1	Tear it.
T	Th--th--Oh! Do you, do you know what a colt is, now?
C_1	Oh, kill it, kill it!
T	No, what's a colt?
C_1	Somethin' you wear.

Source: Piestrup, 1973, p. 3.

Table 4

Teacher Accommodation

T	There's an 'l' in it. "Coat" is c-o-a-ah--don't laugh, that's all right. "Colt" is very hard for city children, because they haven't been out on the farm, and they don't know about it. It's a baby, a baby colt.
C_3	A baby colt.
C_1	Oh yeah!
T	Remember the story? an' it's a c-o-l-t. "Coat" is c-o-a-t, and it's no 'l' in it, but listen to--Keisha--colt, colt, colt. Now, do you know what a colt is?
C_4	Yeah, I know.
T	What is it?
C_2	A baby horse.
T	Yes, uh-huh, how could you harm a baby horse?
C_1	You shoot it.
T	Hey, you c'--that would certainly harm it. But harm doesn't always mean being killed.
C_1	You try to get on it an' ride it.
T	Well, if it weren't ready, yes. If it were too young to ride.
C_1	It's fall.

Source: Piestrup, 1973, pp. 4-5.

Table 5

Functional Conflict

T	"Off"
C_1	"Off to the--
T	OK. It says 'wood."
C_1	--wood."
T	We would say woods--this book was written in England.
C C_1	Now, I'm through. I ain't gonna read this page again.
T	OK. Well, we're gonna turn the page and we're just gonna read the next page.
C_1	Uh uh! Darren 'sposed to be first.
T	Well, I'm waiting for Darren to come back. Come on, Darren.
C_2	He's a awww.
T	Come on. If you can't find your glasses We'll do without them this time.
C_2	I can't find 'em.
T	Well then, come back and sit down.
C_2	You can. He just playin' aroun' _____ (not clear).
C_1	He crack his knuckles, in the buckles.
C_3	Uh-uh.
T	OK, Zip and Wendy ran to the woods, and here's the--
C_1	I got a tow truck. My mama bought me one.
T	--father.
C_1	An' I got me a car to hook it on. It got a hook--

Source: Piestrup, 1973, p. 6.